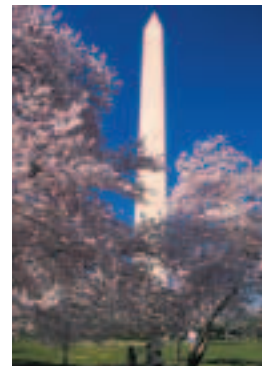


## CHALLENGE: INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

*“The multiplicity of Federal agencies involved in water programs may find themselves working at cross purposes if there is not better coordination of their policies”*

*Washington, DC Session\**



### Multiple Agencies

- Federal responsibility for water planning, development, and regulation is fragmented across 34 agencies.
- Federal agencies prefer and encourage watershed approaches but lack resources to conduct or complete watershed studies on their own.

### Cost Sharing Hurdles

- Project cost sharing requirements prevent poor and rural communities from getting their water resources needs met.
- Some communities meeting the government's criteria did not get projects built because they lacked funds for cost sharing during design and construction phases. Some small communities also lack the required technical expertise.

### Local Burdens

Project completion dates have been extended frequently due to Federal funding ceilings and shortfalls. This has resulted in inflated project costs and increased cost sharing burdens on sponsors.

### A call to change with the times

Participants at all of the listening sessions commented directly or indirectly on Federal and Corps water resources policy. Most of these comments advocated policy modifica-

*\*Topics in this paper were identified at 16 Listening Sessions between June and November 2000. The purposes of the Listening Sessions were to start a dialogue and to provide citizens an opportunity to tell us what they believed the Federal role should be in addressing water resources.*

### Comments from the Listening Sessions

“The Federal government is not **investing in water resources for the future** and current needs.” *Vancouver Session*

“Define and coordinate the role of federal, state, local, and private agencies.” *Washington, D.C. Session*

“**Reduce the overlap** of responsibilities between agencies.” *Williamsburg Session*

“**Facilitate forums and summits** that organize local action.” *Chicago Session*

“Rural jurisdictions have the least resources to handle problems.” *Phoenix Session*

“**Federal money seems to go to large cities** who know how to get funds rather than the disadvantaged or rural communities.” *Phoenix Session*

“Establish regional water resources **coordinating councils.**” *Sacramento Session*

“The Federal government has trouble finding **funding to rapidly fix problems** that develop after a disaster.” *Sacramento Session*

“Establish **cost-sharing based on locally recommended** or locally preferred plan.” *Sacramento Session*

“Change or redefine the **cost/benefit ration policy for rural areas** or for areas with low-income because current policy prevents needed projects for villages.” *Anchorage Session*

“Government is **not investing enough** in water resources projects.” *Vancouver Session*

“Coming up with funds to **replace aging infrastructure.** Seek new authorities.” *Williamsburg Session*

“Cost sharing formula should **consider ability-to-pay.** Look at a community's ability to cost-share.” *Williamsburg Session*

“Funding for inland waterways projects should be **funded at full capability** so that benefits are not lost.” *Louisville Session*

“**Eliminate construction delays** as a result of inadequate funding.” *Louisville Session*

tions to address changing water resources and social conditions or to address a perceived failure of current policies.

Participants at various sessions felt that the Corps should expand its official mission in areas such as recreation, water supply, shoreline protection, environmental restoration, and water quality. Others noted that the Corps is having funding and staffing problems with its existing mission and should avoid “mission creep.” Many participants felt that the Corps should at least review its mission statement and operating policies for consistency.

The overlap and possible conflict of Corps policy with the policies of other agencies or offices was another commonly voiced concern. Similar authorities were noted between the Corps and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, US Environmental Protection Agency, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Coast Guard, Bureau of Reclamation, and US Department of Transportation. Some participants stated that these agencies should coordinate more closely, while others believed that some of them should be abolished or combined into new agencies.

An alternate way some participants believed this concern could be addressed was to develop a national policy on each of the water issues or to coordinate water-related policies on a regional basis. Several participants stressed that Federal policies should be based on good science and should be continually reviewed. The Endangered Species Act was cited as an example of a Federal policy with wide-ranging economic water resources impacts that a few participants believed was not being properly managed.

Many participants commented on specific aspects of Corps policy. A shift in Corps persona from a regulator/consultant to a facilitator/partner was seen as desirable by some participants. Several participants commented on the need to shift some decision-making authority from Corps Headquarters to the Districts to increase flexibility and responsiveness to local issues. Some participants

noted a lack of specificity in Corps policies, specifically for non-structural projects and isolated wetlands. A few participants believed that independent review of larger or controversial Corps projects should be instituted. Some participants felt that the Corps should be allowed to provide technical assistance for local projects that do not support the Corps’ official mission.

### How should the Corps change?

Federal and Corps Water Resources Policy was identified as an important challenge in St. Louis, Missouri and Honolulu, Hawaii. The role of the Corps in water resources issues was discussed heavily in St. Louis. Some St. Louis participants felt that the Corps needed to be completely reformed, some believed the Corps needed to better address environmental issues, and others stated that the Corps should be allowed to continue on its current path.



Participants in Honolulu believed that Federal policies should recognize the unique ecological and cultural setting of the islands. The application of Federal water policy to unique local hydrological conditions was also a concern to participants in Phoenix, Arizona. Participants at the Sacramento, California; Chicago, Illinois; New Brunswick, New Jersey; and Woburn, Massachusetts felt that the Corps should place more emphasis on shoreline protection.

### *Americans say the Federal government should:*

- Better coordinate between agencies to reduce policy overlaps and conflicts.
- Fund a pilot holistic watershed management study at full Federal expense.
- Conduct a gap analysis of all water resources.
- Develop watershed or river basin commissions to coordinate basin activity.
- Consider funding a national group such as the Water Resources Council to coordinate water resources policy.
- Provide full funding over the project term.
- Develop policies sensitive to a community’s ability to cost share.
- Instead of funding individual programs, fund all water resources programs using a “water resources appropriation bill.”
- Reduce construction backlogs of authorized water resources projects and justified maintenance.
- Encourage multi-objective approaches.
- Increase interaction and communication with stakeholders.